

The Alexander Thomson Society NEWSLETTER

Nº 6 JANUARY 1993

WHO DESIGNED ARRANVIEW?

Who designed Arranview, Airdrie? Anyone reading the new *Monklands* architectural guide published by the RIAS this year would be led to believe that it was undoubtedly by Thomson, and that it was erected in 1870.

Why, then, did McFadzean exclude it from *The Life and Work of Alexander Thomson*? The answer is that there is no documentary evidence to prove that Thomson designed it. That apart, McFadzean examined the building as part of his researches for his book, and seems to have reached the conclusion that, qualitatively speaking, the house was not up to Thomson standard.

As the illustration on this page reveals, that is a hard argument to sustain. The design includes a number of instantly recognisable elements. The asymmetrical composition is absolutely correct, the roof pitches look right, the battered masonry walls, incised ornament, pilasters and even the campanile all have precedents at Holmwood, the double villa, Tor House, and many other Thomson examples.

Intrigued by this puzzle, a visit was made to Airdrie Public Library to see what could be established. The result was the discovery that the house was designed in 1868, at the very latest. This was confirmed from the valuation roll, which, while very tedious to search, is absolute proof that a building did, or did not, exist at a certain time. The building appears as 'Arranview House, Commonhead Street', its rightful location in the 1868-1869 roll, probably prepared in the autumn of 1868.

The significance of this is considerable. Would any other architect produce such a derivative design while



Thomson was very active and still alive? It is not impossible, but seems unlikely.

Another discovery was made at the Library. It would appear from old maps that the porch visible in later photographs of the house was built post-1897, and cannot be by Thomson, although it harmonises remarkably well with the house frontage.

Note, too, the garden design (see page 3) which is much more picturesque in the drawing than in the photograph. Did the reorganisation take place when the porch was added? It seems more than probable.

But who would have occupied such a house, and what is the likelihood

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WHO DESIGNED ARRANVIEW?

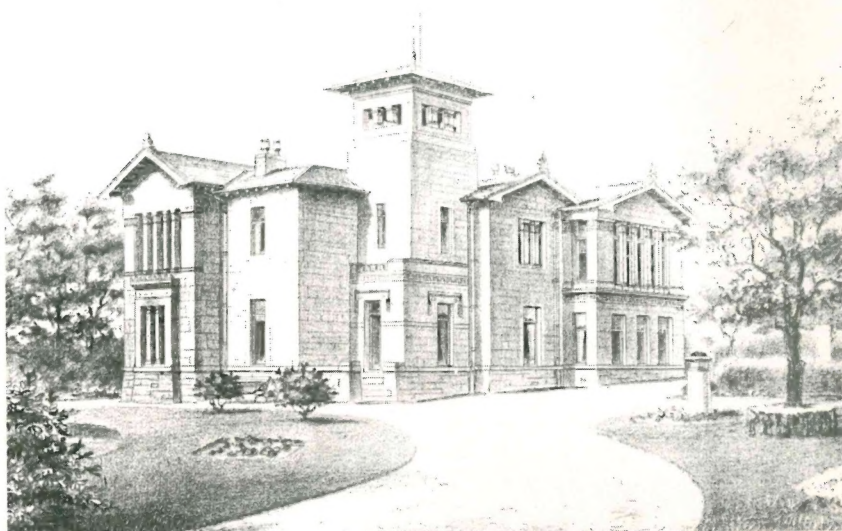
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that s/he would use Alexander Thomson as architect? As can be seen from the illustration, the owner—for whom it was built—was Gavin Black Motherwell, solicitor, whose clients were described in the 1880s as 'most of the neighbouring gentry', presumably the coalmasters, ironmasters and factory owners of Airdrie. Motherwell completed his law studies at Edinburgh University in 1865 at the latest, the year he became a Procurator of the Sheriff Court. Motherwell is seen in the illustration dressed in the finery of the provost of Airdrie, a post he took up in 1883.

There is no obvious connection between this pillar of provincial society and Thomson. Ecclesiastically, Motherwell was an elder of the local kirk, New Monkland Parish Church, ruling out a United Presbyterian connection. And why should he refrain from using local architect, James Thomson? This mystery remains.



Another communication compounds the confusion surrounding the authorship of Arranview. A descendant of Motherwell, living in Ireland, recalls the visit of a Mr Thomson to the house next door to Arranview, erected earlier in the century by Motherwell's father, and suggests that this same Mr Thomson may have designed Arranview. The house next door is known to have been designed by James Thomson of



Above: Arranview in the late 19th Century

Below: Gavin Black Motherwell, Provost of Arran in 1883

Airdrie, and the attribution, based on a recollection of an event long after Arranview was designed, seems mistaken, as James Thomson never designed buildings remotely like anything by Alexander Thomson.

In summary, then, we are left with a date which strongly suggests Thomson authorship, and no reliable, conflicting evidence. Indeed, Arranview fills a gap, noticed by McFadzean, in Thomson's output. There are few known works from this period and the attribution makes sense from this point of view. The most persuasive evidence, in this writer's opinion, is the building itself, which exudes that compelling, mysterious quality that made Thomson such a genius.

Is it possible that in the building's very name we have a clue? Arranview is so named because the house, on sunny days at least, affords views of the Sleeping Warrior. Alexander Thomson loved Arran, and holidayed there often. Is it possible that on one of his holidays he was introduced to another lover of Arran, Gavin Black Motherwell?

Sam McKinstry

LETTER

Annan Town Hall

John McKean's letter raises some interesting points. I too share reservations over the standard of draughtsmanship and the difficulty the author of the design seems to have had with resolving the relationship of the tower to the body of the building and its entrance. But as much as I may question the relationship of the parts I can hardly refute the description and praise heaped upon the design by Thomson's first biographer Thomas Gildard. Gildard knew Thomson and had access to drawings and buildings which contemporary scholars lack.

We cannot doubt that this is Thomson's final design. We can express concern over parts (but not all) of the draughtsmanship, and we can voice surprise at the handling of the tower. Thomson seems to me never to be totally happy with towers: he was foremost a street-walls architect. Towers were forced upon Thomson by his ecclesiastical, and here municipal, clients. It is the treatment of the wall that shows Thomson genius, and which is evident in the Annan design.

Dr Brian Edwards

*Dept of Architecture & Building Science
University of Strathclyde*

CASES

HOLMWOOD

Holmwood remains the Society's principal case and greatest worry, and there have been significant developments in the saga since the last Newsletter. We, along with other responsible bodies, strongly objected to the planning application to build thirty-eight housing units in the grounds of Holmwood submitted by the developer, Carvill (Scotland) Ltd.

We felt that not only was the application wrong in principle but also of an insulting mediocrity. As well as objecting to the application, we circularised every member of the Planning Committee with copies of the various articles which have appeared in the press about Holmwood to make them aware of how potentially valuable to Glasgow is the preservation of the house in the public realm. Our impression is that the City Council is now much more conscious of the significance of the fight to save Holmwood.

Shortly before Christmas, the developer, presumably aware that he was very likely to meet with refusal, withdrew his application. He then asked the Planning Department what he had to do to achieve the compromise development which, he erroneously insists, all parties were prepared to accept before the advent of the offer of financial help to the National Trust for Scotland from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (we were only prepared to accept development of the grounds as a *last resort* to save the house). The developer also suggested to the National Trust that he was prepared to buy the property from the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions regardless of whether he secured planning permission for development in advance.

Given the deeply unimpressive record of the Carvill Group in dealing with sensitive sites, the prospect of the ownership of the property changing hands was alarming, and the seriousness of the situation was such that a meeting was convened on the

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A HOLMWOOD CLONE IN ADELAIDE

If Thomson influenced the young Frank Lloyd Wright, amongst others, as has been convincingly argued, then the connection must be the Blackie book, *Villa & Cottage Architecture*, first published in 1868, in which both the Double Villa and Holmwood were illustrated in superb lithographic plates. Proof that this book not only travelled abroad but was also used is now provided by Clive Lucas of the Australian architects Clive Lucas, Stapleton & Partners.

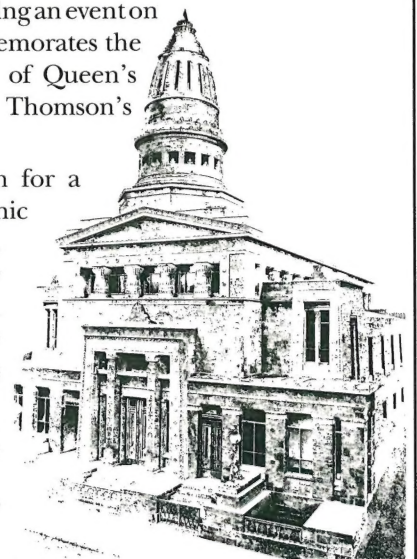
Mr Lucas sends us a photograph of a house in Adelaide, 'The Athens of the South', which was clearly run up by someone with a copy of *Villa & Cottage Architecture*. It is a replica Holmwood—indeed, it is actually called 'Holmwood'—except that certain details have been changed. So are there other Holmwood clones in the Antipodes? And are there other Double Villas elsewhere in the world (as Thomson hoped, by publishing an ideal house type)? Watch this space.

REQUIEM FOR A CHURCH Thursday, 25th March

Having decided not to have a Christmas Party as other societies do, our party last year was held on April 9th—Thomson's Birthday (an event which the Prime Minister tiresomely attempted to upstage). This year, April 9th (curiously, also the anniversary of the death of Frank Lloyd Wright) falls on Good Friday, a completely inappropriate date for a celebration. We are therefore organising an event on Thursday, 25th March, which commemorates the 50th anniversary of the destruction of Queen's Park Church—which many thought Thomson's finest.

To mark the occasion, a 'Requiem for a Church' is being organised by Dominic d'Angelo, at the Double Villa, 25A Mansionhouse Road, Langside, by courtesy of Jim and Pippy McEwen. The event includes a buffet supper and music, as well as a chance to see the Villa, and starts at 7.30 p.m.

Tickets are available, price £10.00, from The Alexander Thomson Society at 1 Moray Place, Strathbungo, Glasgow G41 2AQ. Please send an s.a.e.



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afternoon of Christmas Eve to discuss matters, with representatives from the Trust, the City, Historic Scotland and ourselves present.

The Director of Planning then determined upon two courses of action which were approved by the Planning Committee on 12th January. The first is to seek Compulsory Purchase of Holmwood on the grounds that the owners have not complied with the Repairs Notice served on them last year. A C.P.O. is always a fraught course of action, and one which is rendered null and void by a change of ownership. Local authorities are, understandably, afraid of acquiring properties which may become a drain on resources but, in this case, a written undertaking to take Holmwood off the hands of the Council and to meet any costs incurred has strengthened its resolve.

The second course of action is to declare the grounds of Holmwood (including, of course, those of the adjacent and now demolished house, 'Sunnyside') as part of the Green Belt under the Local Plan. This is admirable as it would preserve the landscape setting of the house upon which the Heritage Fund, rightly, place such importance. It would also render Holmwood unprofitable for development by any purchaser whether or not the house itself continued to stand—thereby perhaps reducing the risk of it 'going on fire'.

We applaud the City Council for

pursuing these bold policies and we hope to report favourable news in the next *Newsletter*. Meanwhile, we are happy to record our debt to Hugh Fisher of Davis, Langdon & Everest, quantity surveyors, and to Bruce Arthur of Over Arup & Partners Scotland, consulting engineers, who, via our committee member, John McAslan, both assisted us with their expertise in demonstrating the unviability of the former development proposals at Holmwood.

ST VINCENT STREET CHURCH

There is little new to record about this case, which is unfortunate. In November, however, at the 'Buildings at Risk' evening in the church (for which see elsewhere), many of those present commented privately upon the poor state of repair of the building and, more importantly, upon the low quality of the repair work being slowly carried out by the Estates Department. Indeed, in places the condition of the fabric seems worse after the repair than before and, especially since the asphalt fiasco (*Newsletter* N° 4), it is difficult to have any confidence in those who are still working on the building. It was discovered that the lobby of the church is so damp that the exhibition stand erected for the occasion rapidly had to be removed to avoid damage.

We have written to the Estates Department to express our concern.

EGYPTIAN HALLS

We have supported the proposals by Elder & Cannon architects for a refurbishment of the building which has gone to the GDA in the hope of securing financial backing. If this is successful, we can only hope that all the owners co-operate in a long-overdue restoration programme. Meanwhile, we have objected to an totally in-appropriate design for a new shop-front in Egyptian Halls proposed by Messrs 'Half Price Jewellers'.

CALEDONIA ROAD CHURCH

A scheme has been submitted for comment to the Planning Department for developing the ruins of the church. The developer, the Monumental Corporation Ltd (who have built houses on disused railway viaducts in Wales), proposes building flats within the shell of the building and on the vacant land behind. While we commend the architects, Michael Davies Associates of Llanbradach, Caerphilly, for adopting a Thomsonian manner based on the design of the demolished tenements once contiguous with the church, and while we long to see practical use made of the building, we cannot approve this scheme as presented as it accepts the state of the ruin as it stands. We believe that the international fame of the Caledonia Road Church demands at least the reconstruction of the external walls of the building. If this was done, combined with a building on the land behind (the church was, of course, never free-standing) we would be pleased.

The Crown Street Regeneration Project promises the restoration of a proper urban context for the church ruin, but the unfortunate road plan militates against a proper treatment of the area. The proposed road running on the east side of the church deviates to the west immediately to the north of the ruin, so precluding a proper recreation of a building on the street line of the original Thomson tenement. This is unfortunate, and unnecessary. Great architecture should transcend the blinkered whims of road engineers.

BUILDINGS AT RISK

The Buildings at Risk evening devoted to Thomson organised with the Glasgow Institute of Architects and held in the Vincent Street Church by courtesy of the Free Church congregation (who most kindly organised refreshments) was a most enjoyable and, we hope, useful occasion attended by about 120 people. The President of the GIA, Eddie Riach, was in the chair and the speakers were David Martin, from the Planning Department, our Patron, Andy MacMillan and your Chairman. But the star, of course, was Lucinda Lambton, who was delighted to find that even Glasgow's taxi drivers knew about and cared about Greek T. Of course they do!

In conjunction with this event, Michael Davies of Merlin Displays Ltd together with Neil Baxter Associates organised an excellent travelling exhibition about Thomson which subsequently moved to Princes Square and will, we trust, travel elsewhere. We are most grateful to all those who so generously created this exhibition on our behalf which is of great benefit to us. As well as photographs, this display was conspicuous for a beautiful plaster medallion of Thomson, based on the photograph which is the frontispiece to McFadzean's book, made by our committee member, the sculptor Alexander Stoddart. We hope, in a future *Newsletter*, to offer our members the opportunity of purchasing one of these very special objects.

WHY WE EXIST...



The Alexander Thomson Society exists to promote awareness of the genius behind those of Thomson's works which remain, as well as those which have been lost.

We reproduce here two of a pair of photographs in the National Monuments Record of Scotland of a particularly interesting Thomson villa, Busby House, built around 1860 and demolished in 1969. These are official photographs, but what of the family albums of the people who lived here, or indeed, in any of Thomson's tenements and villas? Where do they exist now? We have already been in contact with Queen's Park Camera Club to see whether photographs exist of the lost Queen's Park Church taken by local photographers, whether formal studies of the interior or exterior, or at family events such as weddings.

Do you know of people who used to live in Thomson buildings? If they have photographs available we'd be happy to have them copied and rapidly returned to their owners.

Postscript

Some are unaccountably as enthusiastic about the car in the photographs as about the building. Can anyone tell us what it is?



THOMSON'S OFFICE MAPPED OUT

Mark Baines reports on a search and salvage operation for Thomson's office

The building on the corner of West Regent Street and Wellington Street, extended, altered and partially occupied by Alexander Thomson's office has received a stay of execution until 1993.

The original building was a Georgian end-terraced house which succumbed like so many to the advancing tide of commercial expansion in the Victorian era. The corner location presumably made them more vulnerable than most mid-terrace situations by virtue of the greater accessibility afforded by extending the return facade along the street and building over the rear courtyard backing on to the service lane.

Thomson's additions include the four storey building to the rear of the house, separated by a light well but connected the rear of the present building by a common access stair allowing independent access to both the extension and the upper

floors of the original building. Additional space was gained by either adding to or altering the uppermost floor of the original terrace house resulting in an interesting though not fully resolved junction between the two facades. To West Regent Street evidence of the third floor is suppressed by a raised parapet concealing two roof-lit rooms behind (in the manner of the Cairney building and the Egyptian Halls) whilst Wellington Street facade receives conventional fenestration. The doors, door facings, skirtings and fireplaces in the above portion of building are unmistakably of Thomson design.

The pylon form of the principal entrance, the cast iron railings, the re-adjusted proportion of mass to void assert themselves with typical Thomson confidence. The duality of the secondary entrance and the rigorous planning of the

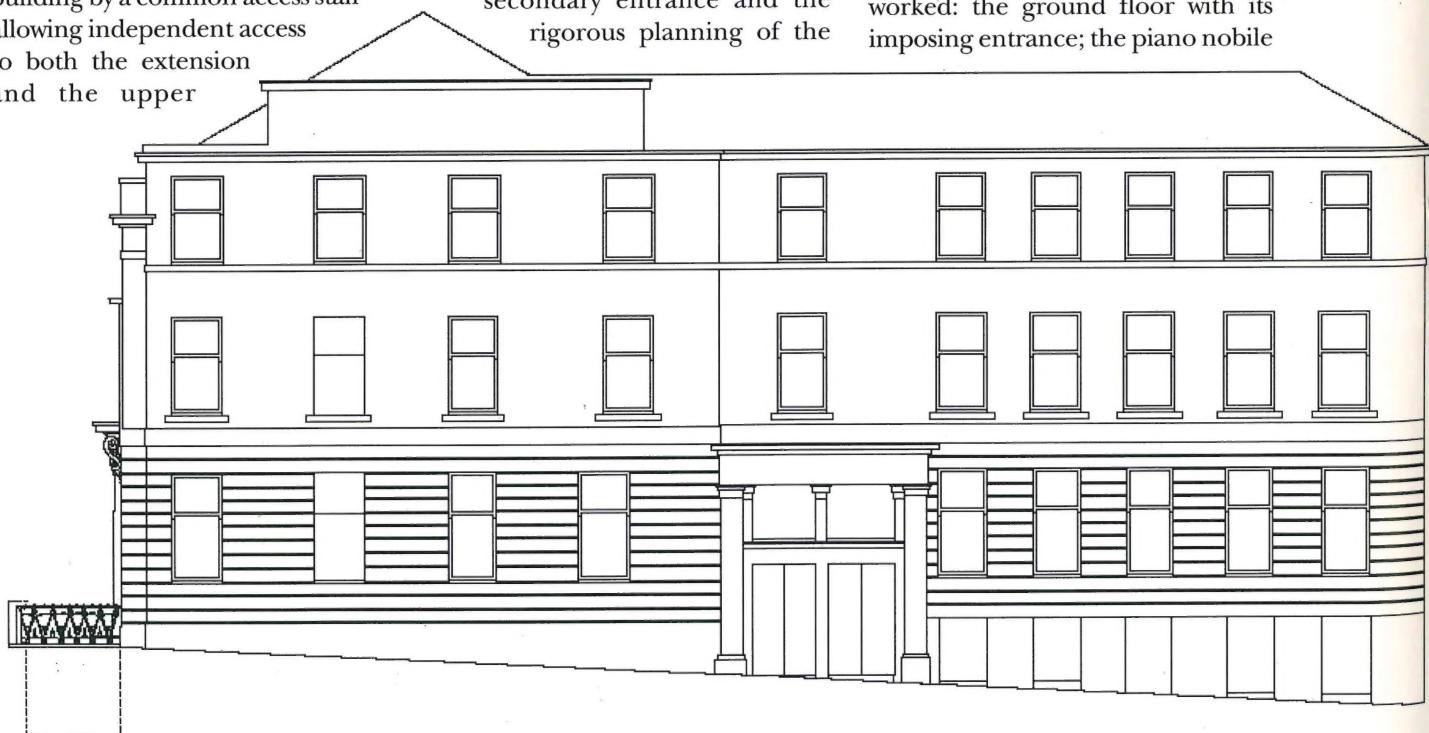


'[In 1872] the building became 122 Wellington Street and about seven of eight steps from the street and on the main floor in order to pin up drawings for consideration and display'.

R McFadzean,

extension reaffirms Thomson's acute judgement of form and purpose.

It is hard to precisely ascertain in which of these chambers Thomson worked: the ground floor with its imposing entrance; the piano nobile





and Thomson occupied two apartments which were up floor. He had the walls of his rooms lined with timber y'.
2, *The Life and Work of Alexander Thomson*, p.238

where a unique Thomson doorway is half buried in later alterations; the panelled room in the extension? All these seem possible but difficult to confirm without some knowledge of the size of Thomson's office or the unearthing of further documentary evidence. Some worthwhile research for someone it seems.

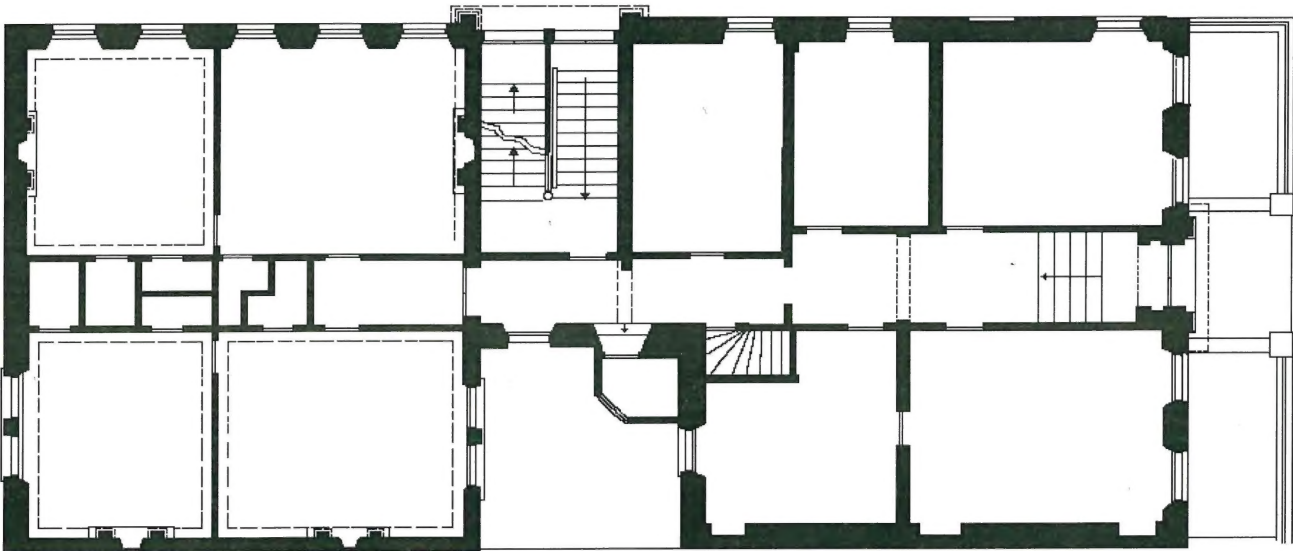
Finally whilst the building does appear to be in a structurally dilapidated condition it does seem sad that the investment in this interior will end up in yet another demolition skip. However as explained elsewhere in this *Newsletter* a number of fire surrounds and glazed panels have been rescued.

Centre: The offices as they currently stand. Photo: Dominic d'Angelo

Above Right: West Regent Street frontage. Measured drawings by Mark Baines and students from the Mackintosh School of Architecture.

Below Left: Wellington Street frontage.

Below Right: Ground Floor plan.
The Alexander Thomson Society is grateful to Mactaggart & Mickel, owners of the building, for their assistance in enabling these drawings to be made and for permission to remove fittings from the offices.



TO CLEAN OR NOT TO CLEAN?

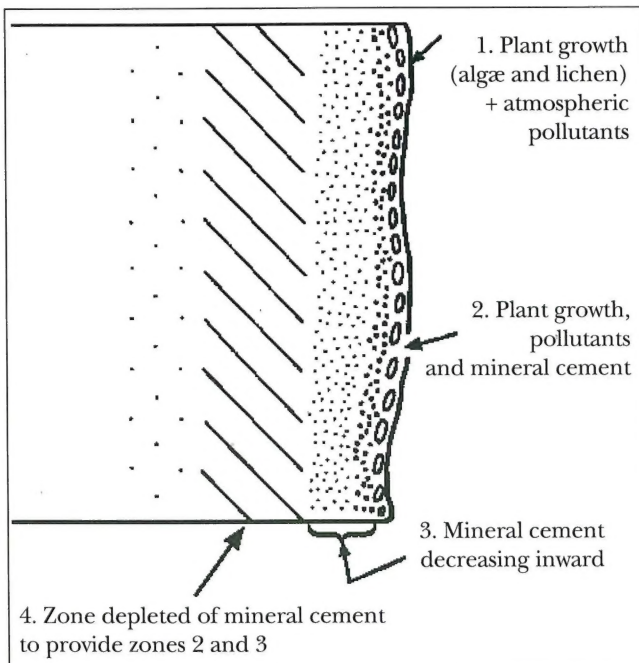
Stone-Cleaning: The State of the Art and its implications for Thomson buildings

Stone conservator Jane Porter assesses the prospects

The question of cleaning stone buildings in Britain has received high profile in recent years, and commendably the major forum for debate has been promoted by those concerned for the care of historic buildings in Scotland. This may be attributed to the fact that the original fabric of many Scottish cities and towns is sandstone, a porous building material whose complex process of deterioration not only weathers 'dirty' but is exacerbated by the cold wet climate of its northern hemisphere. This has given Scottish cities their traditional character of dark and foreboding facades, the legacy of an active industrial past.

The nature of this weathering pattern not only makes its surface extremely stubborn and difficult to clean but causes the stone beneath to become extremely fragile and susceptible to damage and disfigurement

Figure 1: Zonal Patination



from any form of interference. The early use of 'preservation' materials such as impermeable oils and waxes further contributes to the difficulties of cleaning: most have changed chemically and become irreversible with time, but they have also added to the problem of decay by having entrapped water behind the surface over a long period of time. The structure will subsequently disintegrate and become vulnerable to loss from any disturbance or removal of that surface.

Cleaning, nevertheless, has been carried out in Scotland on a massive scale since the early 1970s with increasing momentum over the last five years, and there is no doubt that the benefits aesthetically, socially, financially and politically have proved enormous, no less so than in Glasgow. The question now being asked is whether the general cleaning methods used to date may prove these

benefits to be short-term, due to the growing evidence of irreversible long-term structural damage and accelerated decay now being recorded on cleaned buildings.

Research programmes at Glasgow University and the Robert Gordon Institute of Technology, Aberdeen, into the short and long-term effects of cleaning over

the last four to five years have been examining this damage and their initial conclusions were outlined in a major international conference on stone-cleaning in Edinburgh earlier this year. Some of the principal conclusions, supported by scientific evidence presented by both European and American conservation scientists at the same conference, may be summarised as follows:

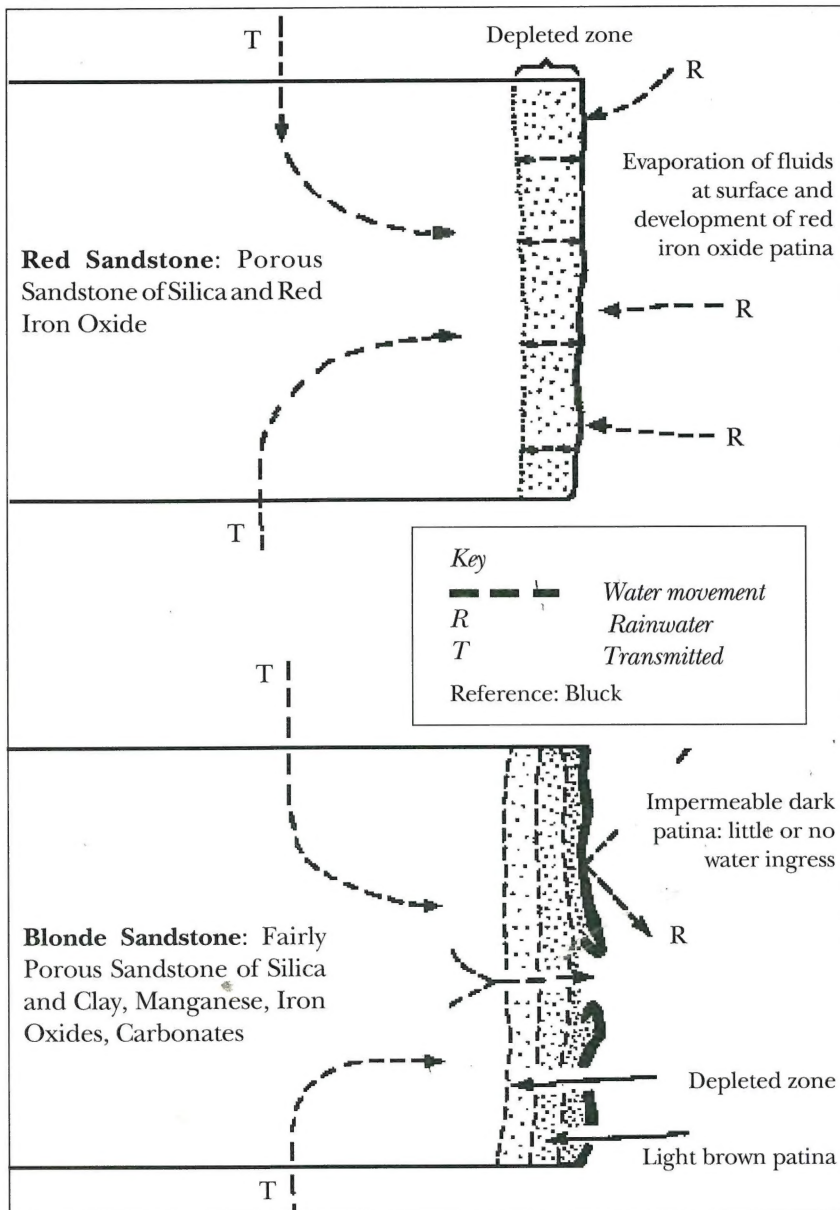
1. The natural deterioration of architectural sandstone, exposed to constant weathering, makes it highly vulnerable to any interference, however sensitive.

2. The main processes at present believed to cause breakdown of an architectural sandstone surface and structure are:

- a) constant ingress / egress cycle of water, creating zones of weathering on the outer surface area of the sandstone; the whole zonal area is termed 'patination', which may eventually cause stress and breakdown as its outer zones become impermeable.

The process of the water cycle causes dissolved minerals to be leached from the internal structure to the surface where they combine with external organic and industrial pollution. The remaining original worked surface will be contained within a tight 1-2 mm band of the soiling layer in the outer zones (1 & 2). Behind this concentrated soiling layer, a large area of depletion will occur in zones (3 & 4). The degree of impermeability built up in the outer zones will be inversely proportional to the preceding zones of depletion and weakness and will vary according to the

Figure 2: Ingress / Egress Cycle of Water



composition and porosity of the stone (see figs. 1 and 2).

b) prolonged water retention which encourages microbiological activity and algal growth—the latter particularly in the West of Scotland. Both lead to disfigurement and discolouration of the surface; microbiological activity is now believed to be one of the major sources of natural staining, spalling and structural disintegration of a sandstone surface.

3. If long-term preservation is required, methods of stonecleaning which either accelerate or induce the above processes should not be considered acceptable. Any method of cleaning therefore should:

a) be sufficiently controlled to

work to the remaining original surface (up to 1–2mm) without entering weakened depleted areas, where chemical attack from acid and alkali solutions or physical attack from insensitive abrasion or pressure hosing techniques may stimulate massive loss;

b) not stimulate microbiological activity or algal growth, either by increasing porosity and thus water retention within the stone or by depositing chemicals—both encouraging such processes;

c) not threaten the long-term structural stability of the stone by depositing specific soluble and insoluble salts, with no guarantee of removal, which in combination with water will cause damage from

pressure of crystallisation and clay expansion.

4. The present methods of stone-cleaning used by the UK industry must still be considered experimental. There has been insufficient research and post-clean monitoring data on these methods to establish a proper understanding of their long-term effects. There is now, however, sufficient research and evidence on cleaned buildings in both Glasgow and Edinburgh to conclude that:

a) Current wholesale methods and procedures of cleaning lack the control and understanding to avoid long-term chemical and structural damage.

b) Chemical methods in many instances have been conclusively proved to damage any stone (even granite) in the long term by increasing porosity and thus water retention, and by depositing residual chemicals and salts. The specific chemicals used, either in themselves or in what they release from the stone, provide elements which combine with sulphur to generate new and undesirable minerals which will accelerate long-term decay e.g. sodium sulphate (thenardite). They will also stimulate bacterial, algal and fungal activity, accelerate feldspar deterioration to clay, and cause expansion of clays which leads to structural disintegration.

c) The most controllable method of cleaning with the least potential to cause long-term damage, e.g. dry airbrasive, still requires refinement and development to prevent surface damage, and its success will always depend on the

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skill and specific training of the operator.

d) More research and training to a professional conservation standard is required in the UK to give current practitioners in stone-cleaning and those responsible for the care of buildings a better scientific and practical understanding in order for them to clean safely (or make decisions on stone-cleaning) with a guarantee of long-term preservation. There is as yet no nationally accepted conservation standard on:

a) the aesthetics of cleaning, e.g. degree, level and colour;

b) structured guidelines to procedure and method in pre-clean analysis, application and post-clean monitoring;

nor is there any specific national supervisory body containing advisors jointly qualified in both the science and practice of stone conservation who would be able to draw up an adequately comprehensive code of cleaning for long-term preservation, and provide a national structure for control of current cleaning practice in the UK.

The damaging effects presently being recorded from the current methods of stone-cleaning can therefore be attributed to a lack of understanding of what may occur to a stone building when it is cleaned. It is encouraging to note that training courses are now being planned by Government bodies responsible for the care of historic buildings which will include practical skilled training with materials science courses in stone and building materials. It is hoped that these courses may be drawn up and, where possible, directed by experienced specialist stone conservators practising in the field and be available to architects as well as operators. However these are not yet in place, and the practice of wholesale cleaning without specially trained teams of operators under professional conservation guidelines and supervision continues.

Contrary to the damage now known to result from these general



St Vincent Street Church tower: would it be better off uncleaned? Photo: E.R. Jarrett, © Architectural Association

methods, research and conservation experience has shown that any weathered stone building, particularly with fine sculptural detail, requires individual consideration if a sensitive clean is to be ensured and long-term damage avoided. A good deal of research and practical specialist advice therefore must go into selecting a cleaning specification tailored to the nature and condition of the stone. Care should also be taken to ensure

that the 'specialist' conservation advice taken should be drawn from a well-accredited source, as it is now becoming apparent that not all those who associate themselves with conservation work in Britain are sufficiently trained and aware of all the issues.

Surely our finest historic buildings merit the care of the best specialist consideration with tighter controls and procedures, even if funding and treatment must be delayed.

Stone-cleaning and Alexander Thomson Buildings

The principal stone used by Thomson for his buildings in Glasgow was Giffnock sandstone. Its colour as quarried was a pale grey with specks of iron, giving it a slightly cold hue and not the pale to brown honey colour that we know today. This transformation of colour is irreversible and has been produced by 100–140 years of weathering and the water cycle. The fine aspect of this freestone and the ease with which it could be worked, however, did not match its poor resilience to weathering. Unlike its red sandstone neighbour, it contains high percentages of clay and iron which have caused it to weather extensively.

The weathering cycle of water ingress / egress will cause the clays to expand causing internal pressure and subsequent structural breakdown and surface spalling. Equally the iron content will be encouraged to dissolve and be brought to the surface; where this has been caused on a massive scale the resulting patination will become impermeable and will trap water and salts behind it. Such a harmful accumulation will cause the structure behind the surface to weaken and disintegrate, and its pressure finally force the surface to spall. The impermeability of the surface will be increased by the natural presence of clays, but also by waxes and oils (often pigmented with lamp-black) which appear to have been applied often to Thomson's buildings as a preservation / waterproofing technique throughout their lifetime.

The resulting spalling of the ashlar surface poses severe problems for

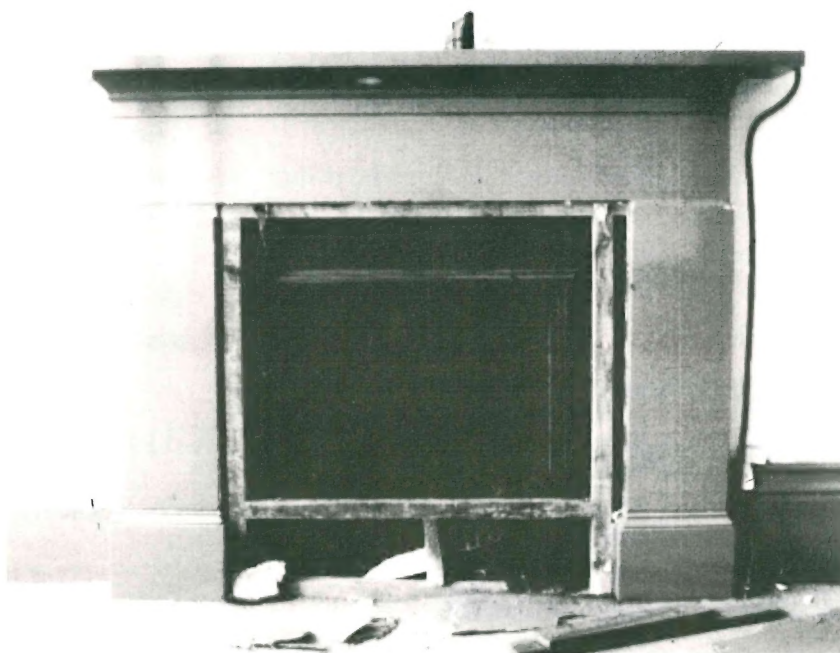
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RESCUED FROM THE RUINS

As reported in the last *Newsletter*, the Society has taken delivery of ten white marble chimney pieces by Thomson which have been salvaged from the building on the corner of Wellington Street and West Regent Street where Thomson had his office at the end of his career. The site is described by Mark Baines elsewhere in this issue.

The chimney pieces are of simple but characteristic design (illustration herewith). The mantle-shelf stands 4ft 4 1/2 ins [1330 mm] above the ground and is 6 ft [1830 mm] wide. The opening for the fire is 3 ft 3 1/2 ins [1005 mm] high by 3 ft 4 ins [1020 mm]. The flanking uprights are 10 ins [255 mm] wide, increasing to 11 3/4 ins [300 mm] wide at the base.

Two of these chimney pieces have already gone to Thomson houses to replace long-lost original fireplaces and a third is bespoke, but we remain



anxious to find homes for the remainder in buildings designed by Thomson. For further information,

please contact the Chairman at Moray Place.

Photo: Gavin Stamp

To Clean or Not to Clean?

anyone wishing not only to clean but to retain the rich incised detail for which Thomson was famous.

The abundant sculptural detail will weather more intensely than the ashlar, as more water will pass through it and a thicker impermeable patination will form, possibly throughout its whole diameter, such as in the pilasters and decorative carved cornices and capitals in high relief. The surfaces of this detail will be heavily deteriorated, fragile, and ready to fall away; cracking, spalling and loss can often be seen, particularly at bases and undersides where water collects.

Given the extensive deterioration of the stone and the complex problems involved, it is suggested that the current cleaning methods presently in use would be totally inadequate for Thomson. Both short and long-term effects of chemicals in such a clay-rich stone would prove disastrous, and the high pressure water washing involved would instantly detach all spalling surfaces. Wholesale abrasive cleaning could equally cause immed-

iate loss of surface.

If the incised and sculptural detail of Thomson's architecture, is to be given any chance of preservation at all, it should be considered a matter for specialist conservation. Money should be sought for research to study its fabric and deterioration problems under conservation guidance. The results would indicate the degree to which Thomson's architecture could be saved and possibly cleaned by new conservation methods, including the use of specifically designed lasers. These are currently under development. Approaches to the architectural conservation funds of the Getty or the EC might be usefully considered.

The Scott Monument Public Inquiry

The inquiry into the cleaning of the Scott Monument has recently been completed. Important research data undertaken throughout the course of the Inquiry has thrown doubt on several preconceived ideas associated with the stone-cleaning process and its effects and it has

become clear that the whole approach to stone-cleaning will require serious reconsideration in the light of the new evidence. The 'legal interpretation' of this evidence will not be available until later in the Spring, when the technical significance of the data may be more fully analysed by professional scientific conservation bodies.

Associated reading:

1. *Stone Industries*. March 1991, Vol. 2 'Sandstone Buildings and Cleaning Problems', B.J. Bluck and J. Porter. April 1991, Vol. 3 'Aims and Methods of Sandstone Cleaning', B.J. Bluck and J. Porter.
2. *UKIC Conservation News*, Nov. 1991, N° 46, 'Stone-cleaning', J. Porter.
3. RGIT (Masonry/Conservation Research Group) *Stone Cleaning in Scotland: Research Commission Investigating the Effects of Cleaning Sandstone*. 1st Edition 1992, Historic Scotland/Scottish Enterprise, (Research Summary + 3 Volumes).
4. WEBSTER, R.G.M. (ed.) *Stone-Cleaning and the Nature, Soiling and Decay Mechanisms of Stone*. Proceedings of the International Conference, Edinburgh, April 1992, Historic Scotland/RGIT.

Wednesday Lecture Series

Following the success of last year's introductory lectures on Thomson, we have organised three more lectures investigating wider aspects of Thomson's significance.

The lectures will be held on Wednesday evenings at 7.00 p.m. in the Ground Floor Lecture Theatre of the Mackintosh School of Architecture, 177 Renfrew Street (The Bourdon Building, next to the School of Art).

Admission £2.00 (£1.00) per lecture / £5.00 (£2.50) for three.

17th February : Mark Baines: **Thomson's Continuing Relevance**

3rd March: Gavin Stamp: **Thomson At Home and At Work**

17th March: Sam McKinstry: **Thomson's Clones: the work of Alexander Thomson's imitators and successors**

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Second Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday, 18th November at the Clyde Port Authority Building, Glasgow. Here is a summary of the main points from the evening.

Membership: There are now 462 members, mostly individual rather than corporate members. Most members live in Central Scotland, although we send *Newsletters* as far afield as Bulgaria, the USA, Canada, Singapore and Nigeria. One problem: people keep forgetting to tell us when they move!

Accounts: The Society's accounts show a healthy surplus, after having been professionally audited in anticipation of the Society's becoming a charity.

Activities: Society events in the summer included visits to Holmwood, Lenzie, Cove and Helensburgh, the Necropolis and N° 4 Great Western Terrace. A Winter series of four lectures attracted a healthy response.

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Alexander 'Greek' Thomson Glasgow's Other World-Class Architect

During 1992 the Society published a new illustrated membership leaflet, which includes the drawing of St Vincent Street Church tower, from Robin Ward's *Some City Glasgow* shown here.

The leaflet has already been widely distributed through such organisations as the Friends of Scottish Opera and to visitors to the Society's exhibition stand at Prince's Square. If you know of an organisation through which we could distribute our leaflet, write and let us know: or ask for one yourself and send it to a friend!

ALEXANDER THOMSON SOCIETY COMMITTEE

Chairman: Gavin Stamp

Hon. Secretary: Dominic d'Angelo

Hon. Treasurer: Sam McKinstry

Hon. Minutes Secretary: Veronica Wright

Committee: Mark Baines, Roger Emmerson, Roger Guthrie, John McAslan, Pippy McEwen, Alexander Stoddart, Elizabeth Vigue-Culshaw

Our Patrons are The Marquess of Bute, Professor Andor Gomme, Professor Andrew MacMillan